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ABSTRACT

In 1985 Congress instructed the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) to report every two years on the state of humanities throughout the United States. This report is the first to be issued. Although community humanities' programs have increased, the number of college students enrolled in humanities courses has dropped considerably within the last 20 years. The effect scholarship has had on teaching and the emphasis on current political issues in classrooms are discussed. The role of the Western tradition as a focus for education is debated as higher education institutions create courses and undergraduate requirements in non-Western courses. The effects of television on the reading habits of U.S. citizens is outlined and this medium's potential for the humanities includes educational programming on public television stations and the availability of films on videocassettes. The public's support of the "William Wordsworth and the Age of English Romanticism" exhibition, opened at the New York Public Library in October, 1987, reflects its growing interest in such projects. The report concludes with a series of recommendations on how the humanities can be strengthened by the three major providers of public education: colleges and universities; television; and the "parallel school," i.e., museums, libraries, humanities councils, historical organizations, and the like. (DJC)

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Humanities In America

A Report to the President, the Congress, and the American People

Lynne V. Cheney
Chairman

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National Endowment for the Humanities

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Washington, D.C.
September 1988

National Endowment for the Humanities

Imagine a democracy prepared by old tradition and present culture to enjoy the pleasures of the mind.

Alexis de Tocqueville
Democracy in America

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Foreword

In 1985 the Congress of the United States instructed the National Endowment for the Humanities to prepare a report every two years on the state of the humanities in the nation. *Humanities in America* is the first of these reports.

We at NEH decided to organize this report according to institutions that affect the teaching and learning of the humanities in our society: colleges and universities; television; and organizations that bring humanities education to the general public, such as historical societies, libraries, museums, and state humanities councils. Since we considered the state of elementary and secondary education in the 1987 NEH report, *American Memory*, we decided not to include a major section about schools in this 1988 report.

Three advisory groups met in Washington, D.C., and discussed the topics covered in *Humanities in America*: "The Scholar and Society," "The Word and the Image," and "The Public and the Humanities." Determined to consult as widely as possible, I also met with experts in the humanities at fourteen regional forums; in addition, I conferred informally with knowledgeable people whenever opportunity arose. The comments of all these men and women, like those of the participants in the Washington, D.C., gatherings, gave form and life to statistical data, and I have quoted them often in this report. Even when members of these groups disagreed—and they frequently did so—they provided insights that statistics cannot, particularly on a subject such as the humanities.

I am deeply appreciative of the counsel that all these people provided. I would especially like to thank those who, after our meetings and conversations, took the time to write to me and expand on their observations.

Committee chairmen of the National Council on the Humanities served as an editorial board for this report, reading a draft of it and offering comments. I would like to thank them for the care and thought they put into this effort. Indeed, I would like to thank all the members of the National Council – a group appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate – for their continuing conscientiousness. It aids immeasurably in this agency's progress.

I was also greatly assisted by the fine staff of the National Endowment for the Humanities, particularly by NEH Deputy Chairman Celeste Colgan, whose organizational skills have been crucial to making *Humanities in America* possible.

Indebted as I am to all of the above, responsibility for this report and its conclusions is mine alone.

Lynne V. Cheney
Chairman
National Endowment
for the Humanities

The State of the Humanities

Huron, South Dakota
July 8, 1988

Next to the band shell in Huron's city park is a big blue and white tent; and in the early evening hours, hundreds of people begin to make their way toward it. They are farmers, merchants, college students, teachers, children, senior citizens—a diverse crowd; and by 7:15 p.m., they have filled every seat. Still more people arrive, but because the sides of the tent have been rolled up to catch the evening breeze, there is room for more. As a new moon rises, volunteers set up row after row of extra chairs just outside the cover of blue and white canvas.

The crowd waits, relaxed and friendly, clapping along to country songs offered by way of preliminary entertainment. But informal as the gathering is, there is a purposeful air about it. Most of these people have come here with clear intent. Most of them have come wanting to learn about the past.

On this particular summer evening, they learn about Elizabeth Cady Stanton, the witty, determined woman who challenged church and state in the cause of female equality. A historian from California, dressed in nineteenth-century fashion, addresses the gathering as Stanton would have—or at least in as close an approximation as years of study can make possible. The crowd is caught up and asks questions of the scholar as though she were Stanton. "Why do you attack Scripture rather than the way people interpret Scripture?" one wants to know. Another asks her to explain how the death of her brother affected her life. The dialogue is generally penetrating and informed. "When I give one of these presentations," notes a Nebraska scholar, who is observing this evening, "I frequently find myself thinking months after about points people in the audience bring up."

The event in Huron is part of a modern re-creation of Chautauqua, a late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century phenomenon that brought thousands of people intent on learning to dozens of locations across the country. But the gathering at Huron is also part of something larger. It represents the opportunities for learning and reflection that have burgeoned in our society in the past decade or so — and the enthusiastic response to them:

- Twenty-five million people a year participate in programs sponsored by state humanities councils, organizations that since 1971 have encouraged learning in such disciplines as history, literature, and philosophy.
- Library reading programs that bring scholars together with book readers are occurring with increasing frequency across the nation. In Rutland, Vermont, in one of the first of these programs sponsored by a state humanities council, 100 townspeople enrolled in 1978. In 1988 some 20,000 Vermont citizens will come together at locations across the state to discuss significant works in the humanities.
- Nearly 10,000 historical associations exist in this country, and more than half of them have been organized in the last twenty years.
- Five million people recently watched the historical documentary, "Huey Long," in movie theaters and on television.
- In 1970 total spending for admission to cultural events was less than half that for sports events in the United States. In 1986 the total spending to attend cultural events *exceeded* the amount spent on spectator sports by 10 percent.
- The attendance figure for the 1972 premier season of the Alabama Shakespeare Festival was 3,000. In 1986-87, the festival's attendance topped 150,000.
- Between 1957 and 1987, attendance at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., was up by 660 percent.
- A touring exhibition of Egyptian artifacts, "Ramses II: The Great Pharoah and His Time," recently attracted 900,000 visitors to the Denver Museum of Natural History.[1]

Twenty-five million people a year participate in programs sponsored by state humanities councils, organizations that since 1971 have encouraged learning in such disciplines as history, literature, and philosophy.

Statistics do not tell the whole story, of course. It is quite possible to attend a museum exhibition and learn nothing. It is quite possible to read a good book without understanding the ideas that illuminate it. But, as those who have observed public programs first hand are quick to testify, increasing numbers of Americans *are* learning, *are* gaining the insights that the humanities offer.

And our society is the better for it. The Romans, who gave us the word *humanities*, called them the "good arts," recognizing that poetry, history, and philosophy serve ends beyond knowledge.[2] They enlarge understanding by showing us that we are not the first generation to grapple with moral dilemmas. How is it best to live? What deserves our commitment? What should we disdain? The humanities provide context for the decisions we must make as a people by raising questions of social

purpose: What is a just society, and how is it achieved? How do we reconcile the rights of the individual with the needs of the community?

The art and arguments of the past are enriching the present for millions of Americans. There are still millions more, of course, whose lives are little affected; and a fair assessment of American culture must point that out. Our society is also characterized by what may be kindly called triviality: badly written books, terrible television programs, mindless entertainments of every sort. And they exist because there is a demand for them. But the same bookstores that are selling the latest romance novels are also doing brisk business in Gabriel García Márquez's *Love in the Time of Cholera*, Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind*, E. D. Hirsch's *Cultural Literacy*, James McPherson's *Battle Cry of Freedom*, Paul Kennedy's *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, and Richard Ellmann's biography of Oscar Wilde. Through bookstores and subscription, more than a million copies have been sold of volumes in The Library of America, a series containing the works of such authors as Melville, Whitman, Twain, Stowe, and Parkman.[3]

The same television set that brings us game shows brings us elegant dramatic productions and documentaries. In the smallest towns, people can watch opera and ballet; they can learn history, literature, and philosophy from television programs that world-famed scholars have helped shape. Through the mails and in neighborhood libraries, Americans can rent videotapes of "Tartuffe" and "The Tempest," of "The Story of English," and of "Heritage: Civilization and the Jews." And after they watch, they frequently read. A PBS series of conversations with scholar Joseph Campbell recently propelled a book of those conversations and two books of Campbell's writings to the bestseller lists.[4]

Cultural institutions like museums, once the province of the few, are fast becoming schools for the many.

Cultural institutions like museums, once the province of the few, are fast becoming schools for the many. Even exhibitions on remote topics – late Ming scholarship, the history of the city of Caesarea by-the-sea – are presented in ways that attract general audiences and that teach them.

Ten years ago, philosopher Charles Frankel suggested that when we talk about the place of the humanities in American life, we are really asking a series of questions:

> What images of human possibility will American society put before its members? What standards will it suggest to them as befitting the dignity of the human spirit? What decent balance among human employments will it exhibit? Will it speak to them only of success and celebrity and the quick fix that makes them happy, or will it find a place for grace, elegance, nobility, and a sense of connection with the human adventure?[5]

In 1988 it is possible to answer that our society has made progress in expanding images of human possibility for its members, in increasing awareness of what human excellence can mean, in developing insight into the past and all it has to tell us of triumph and disappointment, of

choices made and not made and their consequences. Much remains to be done, but the task, in terms of the general public, has been well begun.

It is not possible to make such a positive assessment when one looks at our colleges and universities. At the same time that public interest in the humanities has grown, study of these disciplines has declined among formally enrolled students. Between 1966 and 1986, a period in which the number of bachelor's degrees awarded increased by 88 percent, the number of bachelor's degrees awarded in the humanities declined by 33 percent. Foreign language majors dropped by 29 percent; English majors, by 33 percent; philosophy majors, by 35 percent; and history majors, by 43 percent.[6]

The most recent statistics, for both majors and enrollments, seem to show a bottoming out of this long downward slide and even slight movement upward; nevertheless, the loss remains dramatic. In 1965-66, one of every six college students was majoring in the humanities. In 1985-86, the figure was one in sixteen; one in every four students, by contrast, was majoring in business.[7]

It is possible to graduate now, as it was five years ago, from *more* than 80 percent of our institutions of higher education without taking a course in American history.

Today's college students have a strong vocational orientation, and the high cost of higher education may offer one explanation. As students become concerned about being able to pay for college, they may well be attracted to courses that promise direct vocational benefit. Although there are studies showing that liberal arts majors do very well in the business world,[8] the reasons for that are not obvious. The judgment and perspective that can come from studying history, for example, while of great value both professionally and personally, are, nonetheless, intangibles that students – and parents – may not consider when facing tens of thousands of dollars in tuition bills.

It is also true that many students arrive on campuses now lacking knowledge of and appreciation for the humanities. *American Memory*, the National Endowment for the Humanities' 1987 report on our schools, detailed difficulties with curricula, textbooks, and teacher preparation that have resulted in high school students' knowing less than they should about history and literature. A 1986 survey funded by the NEH and conducted by the National Assessment of Educational Progress showed more than two-thirds of the nation's seventeen-year-olds unable to place the Civil War within the correct half-century. More than two-thirds could not identify the Reformation or *Magna Carta*. Vast majorities demonstrated unfamiliarity with writers such as Dante, Chaucer, Dostoevsky, Austen, Whitman, Hawthorne, and Melville.[9] Not knowing much about the humanities and, therefore, not having much appreciation for them may make students less likely to choose to study them in college. As Lore Segal, a teacher at the University of Illinois at Chicago, observed not long ago, "Students . . . do not register to read books of whose existence they do not know."[10]

But colleges and universities share responsibility for the present situation. Since 1984 when William Bennett, then Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, wrote the report *To Reclaim a Legacy*,

many observers have pointed to the need for institutions of higher learning to reestablish a sense of educational purpose, to give form and substance to undergraduate curricula, and to restore the humanities to a central place. It should not be luck or accident or uninformed intuition that determines what students do and do not learn. Formal education should follow a plan of study aimed at comprehensive vision, not just of the present, but of the past. It should convey how the ideas and ideals of our civilization have evolved, thus providing a basis for understanding other cultures. It should provide a framework for lifelong learning about ourselves and the world in which we live.

Nevertheless, as a 1988 survey funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities shows, it is possible to graduate now, as it was five years ago, from almost 80 percent of the nation's four-year colleges and universities without taking a course in the history of Western civilization. It is possible to graduate now, as it was five years ago, from *more* than 80 percent of our institutions of higher education without taking a course in American history. In 1988-89, it is possible to earn a bachelor's degree from:

- 37 percent of the nation's colleges and universities without taking *any* course in history;
- 45 percent without taking a course in American or English literature;
- 62 percent without taking a course in philosophy;
- 77 percent without studying a foreign language.[11]

Concern about the humanities on our nation's campuses reaches beyond students and curricula to the disciplines themselves and the way they have developed in the academic setting. Since 1982 when Harvard professor Walter Jackson Bate declared the humanities were "plunging into their worst state of crisis since the modern university was formed a century ago,"[12] many observers and participants have offered similar descriptions. They have written of disarray and isolation, of rupture and distrust. They have written of a lost sense of meaning in academic humanities. And they have made these observations, paradoxically enough, at the same time that people outside the academy are increasingly turning to literary, historical, and philosophical study, are increasingly finding in the "good arts" a source of enrichment for themselves and their society.

The Scholar and Society

The object of poetry, wrote William Wordsworth, "is truth, not individual and local, but general, and operative; not standing upon external testimony, but carried alive into the heart by passion."[13] Literature, philosophy, and history have long appealed for the truths they offer, not truths about passing matters, but insights into what abides. The humanities move us with images, arguments, and stories about what it means to be human: to be mortal and to mourn mortality for ourselves and those we love; to know joy and find purpose, nonetheless; to be capable of good and evil, wisdom and folly.

The humanities move us with images, arguments, and stories about what it means to be human: to mourn mortality for ourselves and those we love; to know joy and find purpose, nonetheless; to be capable of good and evil, wisdom and folly.

In college and university classrooms across the nation, humanities scholars teach with thoughtful attention to enduring concerns. In libraries and archives, they work with care and precision to recover and interpret the past so as to enlarge general understanding. But in the academy, the humanities have also become arcane in ways that many find deeply troubling. "Our work is in danger of becoming completely esoteric," two historians noted recently.[14] In the July 1988 *Harper's*, an English professor observed, "Perhaps the fear that buzzes most closely around every literary theorist is that he or she is a sort of self-deluding druid, absurdly deploying sequences of magic words that are both unilluminating and ineffectual."[15]

Some scholars reduce the study of the humanities to the study of politics, arguing that truth—and beauty and excellence—are not timeless matters, but transitory notions, devices used by some groups to perpetuate "hegemony" over others. These scholars call into question all intellectual and aesthetic valuation, conceiving "the political perspective," in the words of one, ". . . as the absolute horizon of all reading and interpretation."[16]

This approach, too, is isolating, setting scholars apart from men and women who find in the humanities what people have always found – a source of insight into all those questions to which the human condition perennially gives rise.

Specialization

The modern academy in the United States owes much of its character to an event that occurred in 1876. With the founding that year of Johns Hopkins University, a model was established that came to dominate higher education. Based on a scientific view, it emphasized discovery of knowledge and encouraged narrowly focused research rather than broad learning. As Daniel Coit Gilman, the founding president of Johns Hopkins, reportedly saw it, this approach would provide every scholar "the unique experience of having contributed some tiny brick, however small, to the Temple of Science, the construction of which is the sublimest achievement of man."[17]

Sometimes the scientific model has suited the humanities, encouraging careful procedures and a respect for evidence that has resulted in meticulous and enlightening work. But sometimes the fit between scientific approach and humanistic content has been painful. As specialization becomes ever narrower, the humanities tend to lose their significance and centrality. The large matters they address can disappear in a welter of detail. Professor Carl Schorske, in his intellectual autobiography, tells how scornful Charles Beard was in 1935 of the "pusillanimity and triviality" of historical studies. Beard cynically offered Schorske this formula for academic success: "Choose a commodity, like tin, in some African colony. Write your first seminar paper on it. Write your thesis on it. Broaden it to another country or two and write a book on it. As you sink your mental life into it, your livelihood and an esteemed place in the halls of learning will be assured."[18]

As specialization becomes ever narrower, the humanities tend to lose their centrality. The large matters they address can disappear in a welter of detail.

The difficulties following from specialization have become acute in recent years. In the rapid expansion of higher education that occurred between the late 1950s and the mid-1970s, the number of humanities Ph.D.'s nearly quadrupled.[19] As more and more scholars set about producing what Daniel Coit Gilman thought of as building blocks for the temple of knowledge, specialties narrowed and deepened; and the sudden collapse of the academic job market in the 1970s accelerated the trend. As competition for positions and tenure became increasingly fierce, fewer and fewer scholars could risk straying from the prescribed path of advancement by taking a general view rather than a specialized one.

And so the building blocks have piled up, many of them elegantly formed, many of great interest in their own right. But what is the shape of the temple? Although a number of voices have been raised in the academic world about this question, there is still little vocational encouragement for a scholar to undertake the general investigations that can give pattern and purpose to specialized studies. Developing a comprehensive perspective takes time; in some disciplines, it can take a lifetime. But the scholarly profession demands that something be done

quickly, "before the tenure dossier closes on April fifteenth," as David Hoekema of the American Philosophical Association put it.

When advancement depends solely on the judgment of one's peers and when those peers are all specialists, taking a comprehensive view requires great boldness. With so many knowing so much about the smallest details, the generalist is almost sure to be challenged. "Fifty years ago people didn't know so much," observed Nathan Huggins of Harvard University, "but now there is very little you can say in a generalized, synthetic way." The very attempt to address a large audience is often viewed with suspicion, labeled "journalism" or "entertainment," rather than scholarship.

Overspecialization frequently makes the academy a target for outsiders. It is scarcely possible any longer for a professional group like the Modern Language Association to hold a convention without the titles of such papers as "Written Discourse as Dialogic Interaction" or "Abduction, Transference, and the Reading Stage" being held up as examples of how trivial academic study of the humanities has become.[20] Such criticism is often dismissed as anti-intellectual; but scholars themselves lament the splintering of their disciplines and the increasing diminishment of the audiences they address. In its June 1986 issue, *The Journal of American History* reported on a questionnaire filled out by its readers. "To pick up these questionnaires is to hear many voices speaking the same thought," wrote David Thelen, *Journal* editor. And that thought is about too much specialization. "Our field has too many books that ought to have been footnotes," one reader wrote. Another said, "Our discipline is excessively compartmentalized and irrelevant except to our own diminishing numbers." And another: "The level of specialization increases, while the significance of research moves toward the vanishing point."[21]

New theoretical approaches have made it difficult even for colleagues in the same discipline to understand one another.

In recent years, the methods of scholars, like the subjects they deal with, have become highly specialized. New methodological approaches – ranging from cliometrics in history to various forms of poststructuralism in literature and other disciplines – have, in the view of some, revitalized both scholarship and teaching. Observed Paul Alpers at a forum at the University of California at Berkeley, "The new questions being asked have made things a lot more interesting and lively. They have been a bracing wind that has raised intellectual self-awareness."

Others argue that the new theoretical approaches have further isolated scholars, making it difficult even for colleagues in the same discipline to understand one another. Jaime O'Neill, an English professor at Butte College in Oroville, California, pointed to a long, theoretical article in a well-known scholarly journal. One sentence in the article – part of an explanation for a three-part chart – reads:

> Second, the denotative-connotative-stereoscopic triplet is indebted to David Bleich's idea of language as a Cassirerian "symbolic form" capable of creating knowledge that is "always a re-cognition because it is a seeing through one perspective superimposed in [sic] another in such a way that the one perspective does not appear to be prior to the other" (a process described by Jean Piaget as "the internal reciprocal

assimilation of schemata"), the kind of knowledge occasioned "when we 'get' a joke"; more specifically and pertinently, such "stereoscopic knowledge" involves language evoking the "perspectival possibilities" of always interdependent denotation and connotation.[22]

The article was incomprehensible, in O'Neill's view, even though its subject—how to teach English—is one in which he is immersed professionally.

Almost thirty years ago, C. P. Snow expressed concern about the division between the "two cultures" of science and literature. At an advisory group meeting in Washington, D.C., historian Gertrude Himmelfarb expressed concern about a newer chasm, equally deep and troubling. Scholarship in the humanities is frequently so arcane, she said, that now the "two cultures" are the academy and society.

Teaching and Publishing

When Daniel Coit Gilman laid out his plans for a university, it was graduate education in which he was chiefly interested; in fact, he agreed to establish an undergraduate college at Johns Hopkins only after his board of trustees insisted.[23] The teaching of undergraduates, an afterthought in his mind, has often seemed an afterthought in the institutions that his thinking has influenced.

As teaching responsibilities decrease, faculty salaries increase.

This is not because faculty members dislike teaching. To the contrary, on a recent survey, 63 percent declared that their interest lies more in teaching than in research.[24] But since the founding of the modern university, teaching has typically not been valued as highly as publication of the results of specialized research. When tenure and promotion decisions have been made, achievements in the classroom have counted less than scholarly monographs and articles in professional journals.

There have been recent—and laudable—efforts to redress the balance: recognition for outstanding teaching at Indiana University and the University of California at Davis, endowed professorships for outstanding teaching at the University of Michigan and Miami-Dade Community College. But it will require sustained and thoughtful commitment to make teaching as valued as it should be, because the reasons it has been devalued are systemic. Observed Evelyn Hovanec, director of academic affairs at the McKeesport campus of Pennsylvania State University, "We're dealing with a whole culture that thinks achievement means achievement in research."

Neither reputation nor financial reward is typically linked to teaching, and this is true for institutions as well as for individuals. Examining the higher-education spectrum—from community colleges and four-year colleges through comprehensive institutions to research universities—one sees a clear pattern: as teaching responsibilities decrease, faculty salaries increase.[25] The bias toward research is revealed in the very language of the academy, as the authors of a report published by the Association of American Colleges noted: "Professors speak of teaching *loads* and research *opportunities*, never the reverse."[26]

There ought to be faculty members devoted to research; there ought to be institutions that have research as a primary mission. But a system that so favors research drives everyone in the same direction. As Ernest Boyer has pointed out, even liberal arts colleges, institutions historically devoted to teaching, are increasingly influenced by the model of the research university.[27]

It is often recognized that research is important to teaching, that the best teachers are ones who are constantly learning themselves. But it is also true that teaching benefits research. Classrooms can encourage clear communication and force the matter of significance. Many valuable books in the humanities are indebted to students who asked questions, raised doubts, or simply indicated that they did not understand. In the foreword to his translation of *Emile*, Allan Bloom writes, "By students' questions and suggestions, I have been led toward the heart of the text."[28]

It is also important to recognize that research and learning need not always involve publication. Observed Dean Baldwin of Pennsylvania State University's Behrend College, "There are other ways to do scholarship besides publication in a refereed journal." Reading, thinking, exploring imaginatively over a number of areas in a way that will benefit students is also scholarship and should be so acknowledged.

Without this recognition, the demands of publication come all too easily to dominate the classroom. "Teaching is all too often filling empty vessels with information *about*, rather than initiating the young into thinking and feeling *with*, the books they read," Professor Leon Kass of the University of Chicago observed in a letter. "Students are drawn into second-order scholarly concerns even before they have directly experienced the texts and the *human concerns* that moved authors to write them."

Good teaching is the surest method for bringing students to understand the worth of the humanities, the surest method for encouraging lifelong exploration of what Alexis de Tocqueville called "the empire of the mind."

The kind of teaching that will bring students to a love for the humanities is difficult to evaluate. It is much easier to count publications than to credit the engagement that good teachers have with texts, much easier to judge whether a faculty member has written a sufficient number of articles than whether he or she reveals to students by example and through questioning how and why it is that learning matters to life.

But difficult as it is, finding ways to place value on good teaching is essential. Good teaching is the surest method for bringing students to understand the worth of the humanities, the surest method for encouraging lifelong exploration of what Alexis de Tocqueville called "the empire of the mind."[29]

Politics and the Curriculum

Describing a certain approach to study of the past, G. M. Trevelyan once used the phrase "history. . . with the politics left out."[30] Playing on that phrase, R. W. B. Lewis of Yale University expressed concern about what he sees as a troubling development in the academy: "politics with the history left out and, indeed, politics with the literature left out."

Viewing humanities texts as though they were primarily political documents is the most noticeable trend in academic study of the

humanities today. Truth and beauty and excellence are regarded as irrelevant; questions of intellectual and aesthetic quality, dismissed. "Students are not taught that there is such a thing as literary excellence as they were twenty years ago," said one faculty member recently. "We are throwing out the notion of good and bad, or ignoring it."[31] The key questions are thought to be about gender, race, and class. What groups did the authors of these works represent? How did their books enhance the social power of those groups over others?

These are, of course, legitimate questions, but focusing on political issues to the exclusion of all others does not bring students to an understanding of how Milton or Shakespeare speaks to the deepest concerns we all have as human beings. And the view that humanities texts are nothing more than elaborate political rationalizations has another consequence. It makes more difficult a task that is already hard: determining a substantive and coherent plan of study for undergraduates.

Debates about curriculum today often concentrate on the teaching of Western culture. Should students be required to know about the Old Testament and the New, about the classical works of Greece and Rome, about Shakespeare and Cervantes, about Hobbes and Locke and Freud and Darwin? Since Western civilization forms the basis for our society's laws and institutions, it might seem obvious that education should ground the upcoming generation in the Western tradition. It might seem obvious that all students should be knowledgeable about texts that have formed the foundations of the society in which they live. But opponents argue that those works, mostly written by a privileged group of white males, are elitist, racist, and sexist. If students are to be taught works by writers like Plato and Rousseau at all, it should be to expose and refute their biases. Teaching becomes a form of political activism, with texts used to encourage students, in the words of one professor, to "work against the political horrors of one's time."[32]

The Western tradition *is* a debate, though those who oppose its teaching seem to assume that it imposes consensus.

Several doubtful assumptions lie behind such an approach, the first having to do with the nature of Western civilization and the American society that has grown out of it. Are they productive mainly of "political horrors" or have they not also seen splendid achievements, persistent self-examination, and decided progress toward the goal of recognizing the dignity of every human being? To focus only on error, though surely that needs to be recognized, is to focus on partial truth, and not even the most important part. In what other civilization have women and ethnic minorities advanced farther? In what other society has social mobility so mitigated the effect of class? In what other culture has debate about these issues been so prolonged and intense?

The Western tradition *is* a debate, though those who oppose its teaching seem to assume that it imposes consensus. What is the nature of human beings? One finds very different answers in Plato and Hobbes, or Hume and Voltaire. What is the relation of human beings to God? Milton and Nietzsche certainly do not agree. "Far from leading to a glorification of the *status quo*," philosopher Sidney Hook has written, ". . . the knowledge imparted by [Western civilization] courses, properly taught, is essential to understanding the world of our own experience,

whether one seeks to alter or preserve it. . . . It would hardly be an exaggeration to say that of all cultures of which we have knowledge, Western culture has been the most critical of itself."[33]

The Western tradition is a rich and creative one. From it have come principles that undergird our society and aspirations that uplift it. Nevertheless, the idea that the study of Western culture should be central to a college education is disputed in both word and deed:

- At Stanford University, the faculty senate recently voted to replace the required sequence in Western culture with courses in "Cultures, Ideas, and Values." A proposal that the new courses should aim "to deepen understanding of the ideas and historical forces that contributed to the development of Western civilization, American democracy, and scientific inquiry" was defeated by a wide margin.
- At Columbia University, the required undergraduate course in Western masterpieces, although highly valued by many faculty members, is under attack by others. Professor Edward Said recently told the *New York Times* that young faculty members "loathe [the course] with a passion beyond description." Assistant professor Susan Winnett told the *Times* reporter that the course is "a story of male entitlement."
- At Mount Holyoke College, students are now required to take a course in Third-World culture though there is no Western civilization requirement.
- The College of Letters and Sciences at the University of Wisconsin at Madison has adopted an ethnic studies requirement; there are no requirements mandating the study of American history or Western civilization.
- At the University of California at Berkeley, the faculty is debating a requirement in ethnic studies, a requisite that would, in effect, be the only undergraduate course work required university-wide.[34]

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To be sure, the study of Western civilization is being nurtured at many colleges and universities:

- At St. Anselm College in New Hampshire, all students take four courses in the humanities that range from ancient Greece, through the Middle Ages and Renaissance, to the twentieth century.
- At the University of Chicago, all students are required to take a sequence of three courses in the humanities in which Western texts are read. In addition, almost all students—94 percent of the June 1988 graduating class—take the university's renowned course in the history of Western civilization.
- From Brooklyn College of the City University of New York, to Whitney Young College of Kentucky State University, to Reed College in Oregon, there are substantial requirements in Western civilization.[35]

The Western tradition is a continuing one, and students should understand this. Any course in the American experience should make

clear how men and women of diverse origins have shaped and enriched this nation's Western inheritance. Students also gain from learning about other civilizations, about their values, their successes, their failures. Queens College of the City University of New York is developing a promising two-year world studies program that will give students both a firm grounding in Western history and knowledge of other cultures.

Deciding what it is that undergraduates should study is not only the most important task that a faculty undertakes as a group, it may also be the hardest; and the newly politicized nature of debate in the humanities has made it more difficult. At many colleges and universities, faculties never do agree; and broadly stated distribution requirements—or no requirements—are allowed to stand in the place of a core of common studies. As a result, many students graduate without any overarching view of how the separate courses they have taken relate to one another, without any sense of what Mark Van Doren once called "the connectedness of things."[36]

What shall be taught and learned is clearly a matter for college and university faculties and administrations—rather than outsiders—to decide. But it is also clearly a matter in which the society as a whole ought to have an interest. Students and their parents, for example, ought to look closely at curricula when choosing an institution of higher education. As it is now, "reputation," "environment," and "affordability" are the factors most people say they look for in choosing a college.[37] What the college expects its students to learn is not a primary concern, though it should be. Has this institution wrestled with the question of what a graduate should know and has it arrived at an answer? And if it has, what is that answer? Do students learn how the ideals and practices of our civilization have evolved? Do they take away from their undergraduate years a sense of the interconnection of ideas and events—a framework into which they can fit the learning of a lifetime? Do they encounter the humanities in ways that make their enduring human value apparent?

What gives the humanities their abiding worth are truths that pass beyond time and circumstance; truths that, transcending accidents of class, race, and gender, speak to us all.

The humanities are about more than politics, about more than social power. What gives them their abiding worth are truths that pass beyond time and circumstance; truths that, transcending accidents of class, race, and gender, speak to us all.

Few have given this idea more eloquent voice than Maya Angelou. In Cedar Rapids, Iowa, in 1985, she told about growing up in Stamps, Arkansas, a poetry-loving child nourished by Shakespeare and Langston Hughes, Edgar Allan Poe and Paul Laurence Dunbar. One day when she was twelve, she determined that she would do what youngsters she admired greatly did: "render a rendition" of poetry before the congregation of the C. M. E. Church.

"I decided that I would render Portia's speech from *The Merchant of Venice*," Angelou said in Cedar Rapids:

> I had it choreographed; it was going to be fantastic, but then, Momma (as I called my grandmother) asked me, "Sister, what are you planning to render?" So I told her, "A piece from Shakespeare, Mom-

ma." Momma asked, "Now sister, who is this very Shakespeare?" I had to tell her that Shakespeare was white, and Momma felt the less we said about whites the better, and if we didn't mention them at all, maybe they'd just get up and leave. I couldn't lie to her, so I told her, "Momma, it's a piece written by William Shakespeare who is white, but he's dead and has been dead for centuries!" Now, I thought that she would forgive him that little idiosyncracy. Mama said, "Sister, you will render a piece of Mister Langston Hughes, Mister Countee Cullen, Mister James Weldon Johnson, or Mister Paul Laurence Dunbar. Yes ma'am, little mistress, you will!"

Well I did, but years later, when I physically and psychologically left that country, that condition, which is Stamps, Arkansas. . . I found myself and still find myself, whenever I like, stepping back into Shakespeare. Whenever I like, I *pull* him to me. He wrote it for me. "When in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes,/ I all alone beweep my outcast state/ And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries/ And look upon myself and curse my fate,/ Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,/ Featured like him, like him with friends possess'd/ Desiring this man's art and that man's scope,/ With what I most enjoy contented least..." Of course he wrote it for me; that is a condition of the black woman. Of course, he was a black woman. I understand that. Nobody else understands it, but I *know* that William Shakespeare was a black woman. That is the role of art in life.[38]

The Word and the Image

Both George Orwell and Aldous Huxley were pessimists about the future, but the two authors were, as New York University Professor Neil Postman has pointed out, concerned about it in different ways. "What Orwell feared were those who would ban books," Postman has written. "What Huxley feared was that there would be no reason to ban a book, for there would be no one who wanted to read one."[39]

Many observers, Postman among them, have been concerned that Huxley was right, that video images—television, in particular—are so seductive that reading might become an endangered activity. When giving oneself over to moving pictures on the screen is so easy and when those pictures are so vivid, who will want to undertake the demanding work of decoding dull shapes on a printed page?

For the humanities, disciplines that have long been centered on books, these questions are of particular importance. What is the fate of literature if few people read? What is the fate of modes of thought that reading encourages: complex, probing, reflective ways of thinking that have long been identified with the humanities?

Those who worry about the future of the book in the age of the image have powerful reasons for their concern. There are, to begin with, the statistics that show our national obsession with television. The average adult watches television more than thirty hours a week. Children between ages two and eleven watch almost twenty-four hours a week. By the time a young person graduates from high school, he or she will have spent almost 20,000 hours watching television—as compared to 12,500 hours in the classroom.[40] As a result, our common culture seems increasingly a product of what we watch rather than what we read. A professor at Wright State University reported not long ago that after the students in his class had read about Adam Smith, only 29 percent could

By the time a young person graduates from high school, he or she will have spent almost 20,000 hours watching television—as compared to 12,500 hours in the classroom.

identify the eighteenth-century philosopher. Ninety-five percent, on the other hand, could identify Spuds MacKenzie, the dog used in television advertising for light beer.[41]

Any weekly viewing guide offers plentiful examples of dismal television programming, but even when it is at its best, critics argue, television is inimical to the development of rich and reasoned thought. Cut up into minutes-long, sometimes seconds-long packages, television discourages concentration. Always pressing forward, it allows little time for the mind to double back on itself and question, little time for what magazine editor Roger Rosenblatt called "the quiet, troubled, uncertain business that we trust books to give us."

With the end in sight almost as soon as the beginning credits roll, television has little use for the tangential, for the side trips with which great writers immensely enrich the longer journey. One thinks of the chapter, "The Whiteness of the Whale," in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* in which Ishmael ponders why absence of color heightens terror. "Is it," he asks, "that by its indefiniteness it shadows forth the heartless voids and immensities of the universe, and thus stabs us from behind with the thought of annihilation?" The precise moral and philosophical dimensions that Melville's words propel us into, video images can only intimate. But in another way, television is very specific. It shows us exactly what Hester Prynne or Tom Sawyer looks like rather than forcing us to the active and imaginative task of using Hawthorne's or Twain's words to make our own pictures. We become, in Professor Wayne Booth's words, "passive receivers" as opposed to "active creators."[42]

Television enlarges opportunity, making the arts and humanities available to millions.

Although aware of these concerns, the group that gathered at the National Endowment for the Humanities to discuss "The Word and the Image" repeatedly pointed out positive aspects to television. While the kind of knowledge television offers is different from that offered by reading, it is, as philosopher Michael Novak pointed out, valuable in its own way: Specificity of image, for example, can be enormously important to understanding contemporary issues. "When I teach a class I find my students' imaginations are much more fully stocked with vivid images of the rest of the world than mine was when I was young," Novak observed. "When I say 'armed guerrilla,' they have a mental picture of an armed guerrilla and know just how heavily armed they are. Students don't learn that from newspapers."

Television enlarges opportunity, making the arts and humanities available to millions. Said film producer Avon Kirkland, "I think that many lives have been very deeply enriched by the experience of seeing something on the screen that for one reason or another was not available as an experience in a book. There are many people out there—poor people, people who haven't had access to higher education—who are interested in the ideas that great literature treats. Television can provide them and the rest of us with adaptations that can be instructive, informative, enriching."

Various members of the group also pointed out that advancing technology expands the possibilities of television. Cable television—now

in 51 percent of the nation's households – increases our choices, offering, as does public television, ballet, drama, opera, documentaries. Videocassette recorders – now in 58 percent of the nation's households – allow further choice and add a dimension of control.[43] Being able to stop action and to repeat filmed sequences, publisher Ellendea Proffer pointed out, enhances possibilities for reflection. "I simply reject the idea," she said, "that only reading is good in an intellectual sense."

The Fate of the Book

The most recent study of American reading habits shows that half of all Americans read some part of a book within a six-month period. One might well lament this statistic, particularly since a study done five years earlier showed a 55 percent figure.[44] But author Daniel Boorstin warned against "quantitative obsession" – being too absorbed with numbers, particularly when they are based on descriptions people offer about their reading. "The only more unreliable descriptions you could ask them to give," he said, "would be about their sexual activities or their political affiliations." Indeed, statistics about book sales in the years since television has become a central part of our national lives paint a very different picture. In 1947 when less than one-half of one percent of U.S. households had television sets, 487 million books were sold. By 1985 when 98 percent of the homes in the United States had television, books sales were more than two *billion* – 400 percent of their 1947 level.[45]

Classics are amazingly easy to obtain. In neighborhood bookstores, one can find volumes of Aeschylus and Sophocles, Dickens and Shakespeare selling for under five dollars.

When Theodore Caplow and his colleagues studied Muncie, Indiana – "Middletown, U.S.A." – some fifty years after the original study of that city by Robert and Helen Lynd, they found people viewing television about twenty-eight hours a week, an activity impossible a half-century before. But television watching was not displacing reading. Per capita library circulation figures had remained stable, and there were now many places to obtain books besides the public library: thirteen retail bookstores, for example.[46] As Daniel Boorstin, who has written about the Caplow findings, notes, "In our technological society, time seems to have become uncannily elastic."[47] People watch television *and* they read.

Anyone who has spent time in a bookstore recently knows that many of the books available are what some have called "non-books" – collections of statistics or cartoons, for example, that one dips into here and there, but seldom reads sequentially. It is also obvious that the print medium is as capable of producing trash as the video medium is. But in the vast outpouring of books that has occurred in the television age, there is also much of quality. Classics are amazingly easy to obtain. In neighborhood bookstores, one can find volumes of Aeschylus and Sophocles, Dickens and Shakespeare selling for under five dollars. Observed Michael Novak, "The very best books ever produced in the history of the human race are available for many times less than a pair of basketball shoes."

And there are thousands of other books that serious readers can enjoy, mystery novels and science fiction that offer what Jacques Barzun calls "the *literary* thrill"—the joy of encountering words used well. "Excellence is found in many forms," Barzun has written, "some of them unassuming and even fugitive. The specifically literary qualities can grace a detective story by Dorothy Sayers or a farce by Courteline, a ghost story by M. R. James or a poem by Ogden Nash."[48]

Barzun has been concerned that in the avalanche of printed material pouring out of publishing houses, good books get buried. There is, however, a potent force available for rescuing them: television. Consider the case of Beryl Markham's autobiography, *West with the Night*. When it was first published in 1942, the book was a highly regarded bestseller. By the 1980s, however, it had fallen into obscurity. North Point Press in Berkeley, California, obtained the rights to it and, between 1983 and 1986, it sold a respectable 36,000 copies. Then in January 1986 PBS aired a documentary based on *West with the Night* in the San Francisco Bay area. In the two months following the broadcast, 33,000 copies of the book were sold, nearly equaling sales from the three previous years combined. The Markham documentary subsequently aired nationwide. As of April 1988, North Point had sold 522,000 paperbound and 31,000 hardcover copies of *West with the Night*, with monthly sales steadily around 10,000.[49]

Before PBS aired "Brideshead Revisited," Little, Brown & Company was selling fewer than 10,000 copies a year of Evelyn Waugh's book. When the series aired in 1982, sales shot up to nearly 200,000.

Time and again, television has led to dramatic increases in sales of good books:

- Before PBS aired "Brideshead Revisited," Little, Brown & Company was selling fewer than 10,000 copies a year of Evelyn Waugh's book. When the series aired in 1982, sales shot up to nearly 200,000.
- Before Bill Moyers's six-part PBS program of conversations with Professor Joseph Campbell, Penguin, publishers of Professor Campbell's *The Masks of God*, was selling 300 copies of the book a week. With one-half the series broadcast, sales were averaging 1,700 per week.
- "Reading Rainbow," a PBS program for children, directs youngsters to look in local libraries for the books read on the program; nevertheless, yearly sales of many of the books have quadrupled.[50]

Films and programs based on books are only one way of using the image to increase appreciation for the word. The "Read More About It" project, a cooperative effort of the Library of Congress and CBS, lists specific titles at the conclusion of programs, encouraging reading on topics ranging from the history of Mexico to the American musical. It would also be helpful, particularly in encouraging young people to read, if network programs depicted books as an important part of daily life, if series like "The Cosby Show" and "Kate and Allie" showed books as an important presence.

The Future of the Image

Important as moving images can be for leading us to the word, it must be remembered that they compose a medium quite distinct from print, one that communicates differently, one that achieves excellence

differently. While a successful film adaptation of a book or story will aim at fidelity to the original, it will not be—cannot be—a slavish rendering. Avon Kirkland compared the print and film versions of John Updike's "The Music School." "It's a fabulous experience to read the story. It's a different fabulous experience to see it."

Filmmakers also use humanities texts as inspiration to produce films that are highly original. Done badly, such efforts distort the printed work and confuse audiences. Done well, they result in new works of art that sometimes capture the spirit of older ones in ways that more literal renderings do not. Filmmaker Ken Burns reported on reviewing Shakespeare plays done for film and television. The ones he found most "equivalent" to the dramas, he said, were the least literal: those of Japanese filmmaker Akira Kurosawa. "The spirit of *Macbeth* is there [in 'Throne of Blood'] in ethereal places, in the breath of the horses in the frosty morning air. The great silences of 'Ran' [Kurosawa's *Lear*] come as close as anything I can imagine to the resonances of Shakespeare."

Historical documentaries and docudramas present the past differently from the way books do. When these documentaries and dramas are well done, they aim, nonetheless, not only at the spirit of the times, but at truth. It sometimes happens, however, that the facts of the past are sacrificed in the name of dramatic interest. Mrs. Lincoln will appear in places she never was. Peter the Great will talk with Isaac Newton, though the two never met. Having scholars work with filmmakers on humanities projects is an important way to be sure that television educates rather than misinforms. Sometimes the collaboration is difficult, as scholars realize that not every detail can be used and as filmmakers realize that even an inspired idea, if it is inaccurate, should not be used. But scholars and filmmakers working together can produce work that is both enlightening and engaging, films such as "The Adams Chronicles," "Brooklyn Bridge," and "Booker."

Nearly 6 million people watched "Pudd'nhead Wilson"—a figure that exceeds by several times the number all Twain's novels sold in his lifetime.

With such collaboration, even unlikely humanities subjects can be successfully presented on film. "Voices and Visions" is a case in point. With American poetry as its subject, this series not only presents the inspired words in both sound and image, it provides contemporary commentary about those words and the men and women who wrote them. It provides dramatization, old film footage, even animation, all to help viewers gain, in the words of scholar Helen Vendler, who was senior literary adviser on the project, "a view of the range and play of the American imagination, a sense of the complication, depth and grandeur of American poetry."[51]

Usually airing on public television, humanities films are viewed by much smaller audiences than regularly scheduled programs presented by the networks. "Pudd'nhead Wilson," an adaptation of Mark Twain's novel, received a relatively high rating for such a production, with 5.4 percent of U.S. television households tuning into it. By comparison "The Cosby Show" in 1986-87 had almost 35 percent of the television households tuned in. Still it must be remembered that even a modest rating translates into millions of people; in the case of "Pudd'nhead Wilson," nearly 6 million—a figure that exceeds by several times the number all Twain's novels sold in his lifetime.[52]

Concern has been expressed in recent years that public television will cease to be a forum for educational programming in the humanities as stations find it necessary, in order to increase public contributions, to air programs that draw larger audiences. Many public stations, in fact, now carry such commercial series as "I Spy" and "Star Trek"; and some station managers have been outspoken about the need to move away from programs that are good for viewers – "castor-oil television," in the words of one – in order to provide what people want to see.[53] Will they, for example, watch "talking heads," conversations about ideas? In 1987 several station managers expressed strong doubt, with a few particularly focusing on Bill Moyers's plan to produce a multi-part series of conversations about mythology with Professor Joseph Campbell.

But the public appetite for stimulating ideas, even when "talking heads" present them, is healthy. The Campbell series, shown during a single week in San Francisco, drew twice public station KQED's regular audience. The station received approximately 100 calls a day about the show, more than it has ever received on any topic.[54]

The reach of humanities programs can also be extended through making cassettes of them available. Normal distribution channels, geared to high-demand titles, have kept retail prices prohibitively high – around $300 an hour – but there have been several successful efforts to bring these prices down:

Even television's severest critics realize that it is not going to go away; it will continue to have a central place in our national life. The object, then, is to keep in mind its potential.

- Facets, a nonprofit Chicago organization, specializes in categories such as fine arts films; and, by targeting audiences for them, is able to rent videotapes by mail for $10. Four versions of "Macbeth" are available, three of "King Lear." One can rent "Rashomon," "Shoah," or a documentary about Jorge Luis Borges.
- The Annenberg/CPB Project, using a targeted marketing campaign, makes series such as "Voices and Visions" available for purchase for about $30 an hour.
- The Library Video Classics Project is making a package of 206 cassettes, including such programs as "Heritage: Civilization and the Jews," Kenneth Clark's "Civilisation," and "I, Claudius," available to libraries. Before the Video Classics Project, such a package would have cost a library $60,000. The price is now $6,000.

Such creative thinking about ways to make humanities programming widely available should be encouraged. And so, too, should efforts to create such programming.

Even television's severest critics realize that it is not going to go away; it will continue to have a central place in our national life. The object, then, is to keep in mind its potential. Television, as E. B. White observed in 1966, should provide "the visual counterpart of the literary essay, should arouse our dreams, satisfy our hunger for beauty, take us on journeys, enable us to participate in events, present great drama and music, explore the sea and the sky and the woods and the hills. It should be our Lyceum, our Chautauqua, our Minsky's, and our Camelot."[55]

The Public and the Humanities

The remarkable blossoming of the humanities in the public sphere is one of the least noted, though most important, cultural developments of the last few decades. It may be that the sheer variety of activities has kept us from recognizing the phenomenon as a whole. Or it may be that we have become so accustomed to thinking of ourselves—indeed, priding ourselves—on being a practical people that we have been slow to recognize our interest in what Tocqueville called "the pleasures of the mind."

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It is also true that when we evaluate our culture, we tend to focus on how far we have to go before all Americans know as much as they should. We are fascinated by surveys showing lack of knowledge of the U.S. Constitution or world geography, and our interest is a positive trait, doubtless a spur to learning. But concentrating on what we do not know does obscure the fact that millions of adults are anxious to learn; indeed, that they are learning every day in a multitude of ways.

In preparing this report, I talked with many people who spoke thoughtfully about the reasons for growing public interest in the kind of knowledge the humanities provide. Carl Raschke, a philosophy professor from the University of Denver, pointed to similarities between our own time and the late 1870s, the period that saw the growth of the original Chautauqua movement. It was a time of expansion in the economy, he observed, and of rapid social change as the country moved from an agrarian base to an industrial one, from isolated existence to integration with the rest of the world. "We were then, as we are now, about fifteen years after a devastating war that had divided the country," Raschke noted. "The American people seemed to have been emerging out of a kind of cynicism and slumber and dispiritedness with a hunger for a new vitality and vision. There was a hunger to reap-

propriate and to understand anew values, traditions, and history that had been set aside during the period of conflict."

Others pointed to an increasingly educated populace. "People that cultural institutions have traditionally attracted are a growing segment of the population," noted Dennis O'Toole of Colonial Williamsburg. Kathleen Rydar of the Los Angeles Museum of Natural History described museum goers as people well-educated enough to know what they do not know—and to want to learn it. "Adults come here for things that they missed in their education," she observed.

Learning more about other people in other times—connecting with the past—is something that many Americans spontaneously join together to accomplish. In Shepherdstown, West Virginia, for example, a group has formed to commemorate James Rumsey, who successfully sailed his version of a steamboat on the Potomac River at Shepherdstown in 1787, twenty years before Robert Fulton. The "Rumseian Society," as the group is known, has been working two years building a scaled down replica of Rumsey's steamboat from plans laid out in his notebooks. The replica hasn't been perfected yet. In a test in July 1988, it moved only four to five hundred feet upriver, but the Rumseian Society is determined—and learning. "You come to have great respect for the skills of two hundred years ago," said Dan Tokar, a member of the society. "They had worse materials and inferior design, but far superior craftsmanship."

Americans on their own are investigating the past, but they also have available to them now an array of educational opportunities that did not exist before; and interest in the humanities has no doubt been encouraged by the presence of new ways to meet that interest. Opportunities range widely—from a nationwide public television program on American poetry to a Kansas City, Missouri, symposium on the sculpture of India, from a New York City exhibit on the history of women in the United States to a Philadelphia exhibition on the founding fathers. And federal funds have helped make such projects possible. Since 1966 the National Endowment for the Humanities has supported a wide array of projects in libraries, museums, and other cultural institutions, as well as radio and television productions.

Beginning in 1971, NEH funding was also directed toward state humanities councils; and, over the years, these organizations have become increasingly skilled at bringing what Matthew Arnold called "the best that has been thought and known" to diverse audiences.[56] The Vermont Council on the Humanities has organized courses in Latin and Greek in small towns like Chester and Woodstock and developed programs for newly literate adults in Bristol and Northfield. The Wyoming Council for the Humanities sends scholars into that state's rural areas to speak on subjects ranging from the art of the Plains Indians to the construction of the Brooklyn Bridge. The humanities council in the District of Columbia is organizing reading and discussion groups in public housing communities. The state council in Alabama brings scholars and actors to libraries and schools to discuss the plays being performed by the Alabama Shakespeare Festival.

That festival, which has grown dramatically in the past decade, has been helped immeasurably by private philanthropy, primarily a contribution that has built a magnificent theater complex in Montgomery. Public funding in this case has complemented private, but often the reverse is true. Every dollar of federal money that goes to state humanities councils, for example, is matched by contributions from local sources. The National Endowment for the Humanities' direct funding to projects for public audiences is also supplemented by nonfederal dollars. In 1987, for example, the NEH provided $500 grants to public libraries to purchase important books on the Constitution. The 791 libraries that obtained these grants each raised a matching amount in their localities.

Individuals, small businesses, corporations, foundations, labor unions, churches, civic organizations of every kind, and state governments have joined the federal effort to make public humanities programming possible; and support has grown as those programs have become more intellectually rigorous, more demanding, more enriching—indeed, more worthy of support.

There has always been concern that public programs would provide a watered-down version of the humanities, that they would be driven in this direction by a public less interested in real learning than in a thin imitation of it. But as those involved in public programming have discovered, it is difficult to overestimate public audiences. Anna Caraveli of the Smithsonian Institution said that when she first became involved in administering courses that the Smithsonian offers to the public, she thought "that education would be a compromise, that public audiences would have to be entertained. All my assumptions have been debunked one by one," she said. "Every attempt I've made to make the program more intellectually rigorous has resulted in larger enrollments."

Individuals, small businesses, corporations, foundations, labor unions, churches, civic organizations of every kind, and state governments have joined the federal effort to make public humanities programming possible.

When the National Endowment for the Humanities received a proposal to put on an exhibition of manuscripts, paintings, and poetry of the Romantic period, several reviewers expressed doubts about its public appeal; nevertheless, the project, a joint effort of Rutgers University and the Wordsworth Trust in England, was funded and opened at the New York Public Library on October 31, 1987. "We thought initially it would be a disaster," observed Vartan Gregorian, president of the New York Public Library, "but we took a risk because something like this—bringing together these more than three hundred objects—had never been done." In fact "William Wordsworth and the Age of English Romanticism" was the library's most successful exhibition to date, drawing 100,000 people during its brief venue. At one point, hundreds of people waited in line outside the library to get in.

The show moved on to Bloomington, Indiana, and Chicago, Illinois, where tens of thousands more came to see it. Scholarly conferences were organized. Materials for teachers were developed so that the reach of the exhibit could be extended into classrooms. State humanities councils across the nation offered programs about Wordsworth and the Romantic period.

New Skills, New Attitudes, New Scholars

"William Wordsworth and the Age of English Romanticism" was extraordinary in both scope and complexity. The materials in it were demanding, and organizing them in ways that could be enjoyed by a wide variety of people required skills of a kind that have evolved remarkably over the past few decades. It is more than a matter of aesthetically pleasing presentation, although the Wordsworth project achieved that by such devices as mounting precious holographs of Keats's "Ode to Autumn" and Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" in free-standing plexiglass. Texts and objects have to be displayed so that the exhibit can be penetrated to different levels of depth by people whose knowledge and interests differ. Almost every visitor carried away an impression of the exhibition's major themes: love of freedom and nature, reverence for childhood, regret for lost innocence. Others could delve deeper, investigating the Romantic attitude toward the French Revolution, exploring the feelings Constable, Blake, and Keats had about science.

Museum catalogues are both intriguing and enlightening, presenting the very best scholarship in ways that are challenging, but comprehensible, to the general reader.

Shows such as "William Wordsworth and the Age of English Romanticism" can be enjoyed by diverse audiences, and the purposeful spirit that goes into presenting exhibitions this way reflects the importance given now to reaching—and teaching—people of different backgrounds and interests. Those who work in organizations like libraries, museums, and state humanities councils also place importance on attracting diverse audiences in the first place by advertising what they are doing—hanging huge Wordsworth banners outside the New York Public Library, encouraging reviews in the media of the exhibition. "We are catalysts for culture," is the way Vartan Gregorian put it, "not just repositories. You can't preside over an institution of human talent, human creativity, human memory, and say 'If people don't want to come, that's their problem.'"

As Susan Goldberg, who worked in the Tucson Public Library for eleven years, explained, one of the most important ways to attract audiences is with sustained programming. "If you come in with a one-shot approach and then you leave again, you haven't accomplished much. But you build an audience if people come to expect the institution to provide learning. In Tucson, people expect humanities programs in the library. And they love them."

New skills to promote public learning are developing; there are new attitudes toward the importance of encouraging it; and there is a new group of people now involved in cultural organizations who are interested in providing humanities programming that is intellectually rigorous. Many of those who received humanities Ph.D.'s in the 1960s and 1970s when the academic job market was tight, now work in public humanities institutions;[57] and while they frequently join in efforts with academic scholars, they do not see themselves merely as brokers, bringing the knowledge of others to the public. They see themselves as scholar-educators—and wish others to see them that way also. Said Harold Skramstad, director of the Henry Ford Museum & Greenfield Village, "We have to get away from the sense that public humanities in-

stitutions like libraries, museums, and heritage centers are bridge institutions that take revealed truths of academic humanities and deliver them in popularized form, when, in fact, those organizations are fundamental humanities institutions in their own right."

Robert Bergman, director of the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore, said, "In the case of our institution, we define our professional staff as a faculty, and we define our classroom as our city." Bergman also noted the important scholarly work occurring in museums, pointing to a catalogue that accompanied a Walters exhibition on Byzantine silver that won the distinguished Schlumberger prize for its scholarship.[58]

Indeed, museum catalogues represent a new mode of publication, one aimed at bringing scholarship about the humanities to general audiences. The best catalogues capture imagination with stunning graphic design and with essays in which specialists address their subjects in ways of interest to nonspecialists. *A Thousand Cranes*, a catalogue of the Japanese collection at the Seattle Art Museum, explains what "enlightenment" means to the Buddhist and explores similarities between Japan's medieval age and Europe's. *Time Sanctified*, from the Walters Art Gallery, examines Books of Hours, lovely illuminated medieval manuscripts, and explains what they are, why they are beautiful, and why they were valued. *Chicago Architecture: 1872-1922*, from the Art Institute of Chicago, details Chicago's apocalypse—the great fire of 1871—and how Chicagoans came to see it as a generative event. All these publications are both intriguing and enlightening, presenting the very best scholarship in ways that are challenging, but comprehensible, to the general reader.

Given their value for teaching and learning in the humanities, museum catalogues are not as widely accessible as they should be. Almost half the catalogues surveyed in one study were not listed in *Subject Guide to Books in Print*. For the majority, library distribution was expected to be less than 200 copies.[59] The American Association for State and Local History is beginning a program to aid in marketing and distribution of catalogues. Such efforts should be encouraged and expanded.

Public programming in the humanities is now so substantial and extensive that is has become a kind of parallel school, one that has grown up outside established institutions of education.

A Parallel School

Public programming in the humanities is now so substantial and extensive that it has become a kind of parallel school, one that has grown up outside established institutions of education. Including a wide variety of programs and projects—from reading groups through exhibitions to educational television, the parallel school has much to commend it, not least of which is its diversity. There are projects in Western culture and programs focusing on the way Western culture has evolved in the United States. There are projects in non-Western history and in the ways different cultures have interacted. The humanities council in Oregon, for example, recently helped fund a conference on Islam and Judaism.

Public programming in the humanities is seldom subject to a curriculum. Indeed, it is almost impossible for it to be, given the variety of institutions and people involved. The unrestrained diversity that is one

of its greatest attributes is also a reason why the parallel school is not an alternative school. The parallel school cannot provide the coherent plan of study, the overarching vision of connectedness, that our schools and colleges can. All too often, schools and colleges fail to provide that vision, but it is in them that the potential for it exists.

The parallel school cannot fully succeed in its work without the help of the academy; and yet, in trying to engage faculty members from some academic institutions, state councils and other groups often find themselves frustrated by a research-oriented culture that does not value what they do. Young scholars hoping for tenure are particularly reluctant to become involved in public programming, not merely because it will take time that could be devoted to research and publication, but because it is not regarded by academic peers as activity that is sufficiently scholarly. Observed historian Jere Bacharach of the University of Washington, "When I first got involved with public television and museum work, I was basically told, 'You're putting your career in jeopardy.'" Said Rosemary Joyce of the Peabody Museum at Harvard, "It can take two years to do a good museum exhibition, but that work doesn't count as a scholarly product." When work in public humanities projects is recognized, it is sometimes credited against "public service," a category that may count for little in tenure, promotion, and salary decisions. Observed Anita May, executive director of the Oklahoma Foundation for the Humanities, "Working in public humanities is regarded as roughly the same as organizing a Girl Scout troop."

Young scholars hoping for tenure are particularly reluctant to become involved in public programming, because it is not regarded by academic peers as activity that is sufficiently scholarly.

Important to changing these attitudes—and the tenure and promotion practices that reflect them—is recognition that public humanities has evolved into an intellectually rigorous pursuit. Scholarly journals ought to review public projects—as *The Journal of American History* has recently begun to do with museum exhibitions. Scholarly organizations ought to recognize and work with those who provide public programming.

Not every scholar needs to be involved in programs for the public. There are many whose talents and interests lie in the more solitary pursuit of knowledge. But being involved with the general public brings rewards to scholars as well as to those they teach. As Charles Frankel once observed:

> Humanistic scholarship grows—in the end it develops confidence, freshness, original ideas—when it is fed not by its own professional concerns alone but by the doings of human beings outside the study. . . . And when humanistic scholars have been persuaded that they really are part of the larger community they have also made the largest contributions to their own disciplines. Plato, Machiavelli, Erasmus, John Locke, Diderot, James Madison, Ralph Waldo Emerson are not remembered for being intellectual recluses.[60]

Scholars who teach the public are likely to find themselves concentrating on texts rather than secondary scholarship. "For these audiences, you can't obscure the subject with a whole body of theoretical approaches and methods," observes Anna Caraveli of the Smithsonian In-

stitution. Overly narrow interpretations are also likely to be challenged by an audience that has the authority of maturity. "I once watched a young scholar try to draw an ideological conclusion from a passage in a Doris Lessing novel," says Victor Swenson, executive director of the humanities council in Vermont. "The discussion group wasn't confrontational about objecting, but they weren't having any of it either."

By emphasizing good teaching and by rewarding it with enthusiastic audiences, the parallel school can give strength to the academy from which much of its own strength is drawn. And there may be another gift as well that public humanities brings. There will probably always be in our colleges and universities some sense of estrangement from society, a sense that flows from a critical attitude toward human affairs which is crucial to preserve. But the extreme alienation of some faculty members may well be tempered by closer involvement with our culture.

It is hard to feel alienated from a society in which citizens gather in small New England towns to study Latin and Greek; in which they gather in small towns across the nation to read Plato and Rousseau, Sophocles and Thoreau. It is hard to feel alienated from a culture where Hispanic heritage is studied in New Jersey, the experience of black Americans explored in Arkansas, the culture of China examined in Montana and Oklahoma.

Indeed, it is hard to feel alienated from a society that seems increasingly to understand the importance of a standard Matthew Arnold once held up. "Again and again I have insisted," he wrote, "how those are the happy moments of humanity, how those are the marking epochs of a people's life, how those are the flowering times for literature and art and all the creative power of genius, when there is a *national* glow of life and thought, when the whole of society is in the fullest measure permeated by thought, sensible to beauty, intelligent and alive."[61]

Recommendations

When Alexis de Tocqueville visited this country a century and a half ago, he found much to praise. Americans were a robust and energetic people, filled with enterprising spirit and boundless inventiveness. Fired in all their activities by a belief in progress, the people of the United States were, Tocqueville said, "ever striving toward that immense grandeur glimpsed indistinctly at the end of the long track humanity must follow."

Admirer of democracy though he was, Tocqueville tried to be clear-visioned about it. In a free society, he believed, science, literature, and the arts would face difficulties unknown in an aristocracy. With no small and permanent ruling class to uphold standards, democratic literature, he thought, would exhibit "a rude and untutored vigor of thought," a fascination with the facile and vivid, rather than the rigorous and subtle. Loving liberty as he did, Tocqueville sought ways to counterbalance such tendencies. He recommended looking back to classical literature, for example, for models of excellence from which we could learn.

In the time since Tocqueville visited the United States, our democracy has been shaped in profound ways by people who have looked to the past and learned: by Abraham Lincoln, who drew solace and inspiration from the Bible and Shakespeare; by Martin Luther King, Jr., who drew moral force from the Old and New Testaments, and from the writings of such authors as Martin Luther, John Bunyan, and Thomas Jefferson. But it is not just our leaders to whom the past is important. As we are increasingly recognizing, the great ideas and texts of the past can enrich every life. In a democratic society, the humanities – those areas of study that bring us the deeds and thoughts of other times – should be part of every life.

The recommendations of this report are made with that end in mind. In the spirit of Tocqueville, they recognize that there are concerns to be met as well as great strengths on which we can build.

I. Colleges and Universities

- Our society's understanding of the humanities ultimately depends on colleges and universities. To counter the excesses of specialization and to strengthen the contributions the academy can make to society, those who fund, publish, and evaluate research should encourage work of general significance.
- Excellence in teaching, as well as excellence in research, should be rewarded; and crucial to excellent teaching in the humanities, it should be recognized, is an approach that emphasizes the enduring human value of history, literature, and philosophy.
- Colleges and universities should work toward intellectually coherent curricula. Undergraduates should study texts of Western civilization and should learn how the ideals and practices of our society have evolved. Students should also be encouraged to learn about other cultures.
- Parents and prospective students should consider what it is a college or university expects students to learn. Whether the institution has established a substantial and coherent curriculum is a crucial factor to keep in mind when choosing a school.

II. Television

- Television can be the friend of the book, and there should be further efforts to use television to encourage reading. Both public and private funders of educational television should continue to support productions that are book-related. Network television programs should present books and learning as an important part of everyday life.
- Television has, in its own right, vast democratic potential for education in the humanities. Scholars and filmmakers working together can create highly original works that encourage thought and teach us about the past. Such efforts merit the continued support of those who fund television productions.
- Excellent films in the humanities should be made widely available. With reasonable pricing and wider distribution, these films can become a more important resource for both formal and informal education.

III. The Parallel School

- Museums, libraries, educational television, state humanities councils, and historical organizations now provide such extensive education in the humanities that they form a kind of parallel school. The achievements of the groups that comprise this school should be recognized; their efforts to reach citizens who have not

in the past participated in educational programs should be encouraged by all who support this work.

- The parallel school not only draws strength from our colleges and universities, it has strengths to offer as well. Institutions of higher education should work more closely with other cultural organizations and reward academic scholars who help provide high-quality programs for general audiences.
- Millions of adult Americans, through their participation in public programs, have come to affirm the importance of the humanities. They can be a force for change. These citizens should become more actively engaged in efforts to support substantive and coherent humanities education in our schools and colleges.

The National Endowment for the Humanities, a federal agency that supports scholarship, research, education, and public programs, can play an important role in many of these undertakings; but it should also be a limited one. "A government, by itself," Tocqueville noted, "is equally incapable of refreshing the circulation of feelings and ideas among a great people, as it is of controlling every industrial undertaking." What impressed him as he viewed our young nation was the power of individuals banding together in associations to accomplish desired ends; and there are plentiful examples of this in the humanities: groups of citizens joining together to give time and treasure to cultural activities and institutions; new cultural institutions forming and older ones reforming themselves to provide learning to general audiences; scholars from colleges and universities working with those who provide public programs in efforts that benefit both the academy and society.

Ultimately, if learning increases, it will be because individuals, associating freely, join in commitment to the goal. So it is, as Tocqueville thought, that in a great democracy, feelings and ideas will be renewed, sympathies will be enlarged, and the life of the mind will thrive.

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Regional Forums*

Berkeley, California	Berkeley Center for the Humanities, University of California, Berkeley January 19, 1988
Los Angeles, California	Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History January 21, 1988
Lincoln, Nebraska	University of Nebraska, Nebraska Wesleyan University, and Nebraska Committee for the Humanities February 18, 1988
Las Vegas, Nevada	Nevada Humanities Committee and University of Nevada, Las Vegas February 22, 1988
Seattle, Washington	Seattle Art Museum March 9, 1988
Seattle, Washington	University of Washington March 9, 1988
Olympia, Washington	South Puget Sound Community College March 10, 1988
Portland, Oregon	Oregon Humanities Council March 11, 1988
St. Louis, Missouri	Mercantile Museum March 25, 1988

* Institutions listed were hosts for forums; frequently, humanities experts from other organizations also participated.

Denver, Colorado	University of Denver April 6, 1988
New York, New York	National Humanities Alliance April 15, 1988
Dearborn, Michigan	Henry Ford Museum & Greenfield Village April 28, 1988
Old Sturbridge Village, Massachusetts	Old Sturbridge Village May 20, 1988
Fairfax, Virginia	George Mason University May 24, 1988

Notes

Comments and observations quoted in the text that are not noted below are from advisory group meetings in Washington, D.C., regional forums, and personal communications.

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9. National Assessment of Educational Progress (Princeton, N.J.: Educational Testing Service, 1987), unpublished tabulations. Analysis of the survey can be found in *Literature & U.S. History*, report no. 17-HL-01 (Princeton, N.J.: Educational Testing Service, 1987); and in Diane Ravitch and Chester E. Finn, Jr., *What Do Our 17-Year-Olds Know?* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987).

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11. *General Education and Humanities Requirements*, Higher Education Surveys, no. 7 (Rockville, Md.: Westat, Inc., forthcoming).

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